Interview with Victor L. Stier

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series

VICTOR L. STIER

Interviewed by: G. Lewis Schmidt

Initial interview date: March 26, 1990

Q: This is Lew Schmidt interviewing Vic Stier at his home in Berkeley, California. Vic, I'm going to ask you to start off by giving a brief background of your early life and your education. And then if you had any activities or any work experience before you went into the Information Program, I'd like a brief discussion of that. And finally, what it was that led you into the information work in the first place. Then we will simply follow your career in sequence. So if you would start with this brief backgrounder, I'll ask you questions from time to time as we go along.

Bio Sketch

STIER: I'm an Oaklander. I went through the Oakland public schools and then to the University of California at Berkeley where I was an English major. I graduated with the Class of 1941, which was really the last normal class at the University before World War II took over all our lives. I remember that there were a great number of men and women in uniform. I was married to my wife (of 48 years now) Audine Allan Stier in 1942 and I think I was already signed up for the Marine Corps. They had, I've forgotten the program's name,

some kind of officer's candidate course if one had been at a university or college. I went into the Marine Corps and spent two years in the Fleet Marine Force.

When I came back after the War in 1946, we already had one child at that point, and I had never seen him; he was 18-months old when I first saw him. So, I got a job. I had always intended to be a college professor and writer. I thought I'd come back after the War and get a Ph.D. I was interested in English literature mainly, and I tried it. I got a job on the Oakland Tribune as a boot reporter, cub reporter, and started at the paper's Berkeley office. I didn't make enough money. My wife stayed home. We bought a house for $10,000 in the Oakland Hills, no down payment, located only about three miles east of here, but I worked at my brother-in-law's drug store nights and Saturdays because I wasn't making enough money as a first year reporter. I went back to graduate school, but discovered I'd lost all desire to be an academic. I don't know why, the war I suppose. I wasn't bitter about the War. I didn't seem to have any hangovers from it, but I just didn't want to be an academic anymore.

At any rate, I worked on the Tribune for ten years where I was a reporter and a rewrite man; a rewrite man most of the time I think, and then I covered the Oakland city government for a couple of years which was very interesting, boy, was it! I did all the things journalists do. I ended up as an Assistant City Editor. A fellow who had worked on the Oakland Post Enquirer by the name of Allan Jackson lost his job when Hearst closed that paper, which was my paper's, the Tribune, chief competition. Allan—he was one of the early people in the USIA—went off to Tehran on his first assignment. He wrote me a letter after he'd been there a while and said you'd better come on in, the water's fine, meaning USIA was fine. He worked with John Bruce. I guess John went to Iran as head of the press section, but ended up PAO. He had been the city editor of the San Francisco Chronicle, a splendid fellow.

At any rate, my wife and I talked it over. We had been wanting a change, to see the world mostly. Both of us had grown up in California and despite the War I didn't see anything

in the War except some highly foliaged and dangerous islands. I was not in a single city during the War. I was island-hopping in the Marine Corps, didn't even get to Honolulu, just Guadalcanal, Guam and Iwo Jima. Very limiting. So I wrote the Agency a letter and filled out a long personnel form, was examined and hired.

1951: Entrance Into USIA, Orientation And Assignment To Bangkok

Q: What year was that?

STIER: That was 1955, June when I arrived in Washington. I'd just finished ten years at the Tribune. In Washington they gave me an eight weeks orientation course which I thought was quite good. They used a lost of State and other foreign service-related personnel in and around Washington including academics. The course was quite comprehensive.

Our first assignment was Bangkok. By that time Audine and I had three kids who were, I guess, 11, 10 and 8, something like that, all boys.

We flew out to Bangkok in September. I think we got there in the middle of the month, maybe a little earlier. We found a house and settled in. My first PAO was Jack Pickering, who was a marvelous fellow to work with and for. He had been a Chicago newsman and later went over to Paris and worked on the Paris Herald. Jack was something, his sobriquet was The Growler. It's funny, I had already read about Jack Pickering and had forgotten it. He was in Eliot Paul's “The Last Time I Saw Paris” which was a splendid little book about the last days in Paris before World War II, right at the beginning of it. There's a great story in the book about the people who lived on the Rue Hyacinths in Paris, including Jack, who decided to have a street party. It's a little cul-de-sac. Everybody was very peeved with Jack because he was terribly late as was often the case. Finally, however, Paul wrote—there marched down the street in reasonable sobriety the Old Growler lugging

over his shoulder the biggest fish any of them had ever seen. Jack was something, and a wonderful human being.

My first job in USIS Bangkok was entitled Editor-Writer, which included writing stories for Agency and other publications, pamphlets, scripts, all as a part of the PIP program started by Bill Donavan. Psychological Indoctrination Program, is what PIP stood for, and was modeled in part on U.S. Army programs. It was intended to convince the Thais that communism was a serious threat to them. I don't think it was effective, but it was interesting, professionally. I confess to a jaundiced view because of my difficulties with U.S. foreign policy in those days. John Foster Dulles forever!

Q: At that time did you have a substantial insurgency in the field that you were combating? Or was it primarily a city-oriented program?

STIER: The program was in cities and the hinterland, but I doubt there was any real danger in Thailand. The government was stable. The country was run by a professional Army general named Pibul Songgram, and he ran the country very well. The real stability of the country was the king, of course, whom all the Thais loved, Bhumiphal Aduljadet. They still do. The problem was Thai military politics. Thailand was not any kind of a democracy. The policy chief of Thailand was a police general named General Phao, and he was one of Pibul Songgram's rivals. During our two tours there, we woke up one morning with tanks on the streets. It was an Army coup d'etat headed by General Sarit Thanerat. He ousted Pibul Songgram, who fled to—I've forgotten where he went first. He ended up in Japan and ultimately in the United States. No, there were not many communists in Thailand; a few, but not many. Do Buddhists make good communists? There were more along the borders, of course, both in Burma and up north in the triangle, and in Indochina, which was just beginning to stir following Dienbienphu, and the Vietnam War was beginning. We used the PIP program in Thailand and in some other places. Remember, we had all the printing done in one place?

Q: The Manila Service Center.

STIER: RSC Manila, that's right. Run at the time by a guy named Bill Bennett, another ex-newsman. I would go off into Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam, as was, and pick up what I could find for these pamphlet series I was writing and talks I would give. I went to Laos a lot. At any rate, I was an editor. I was working for George Sayles, who was the Chief Information Officer.

Q: The reason I asked this question was because later when I was there, almost 20 years later, there was a substantial communist insurgency in Thailand. And I was wondering whether this writing you were doing in this pamphlet series was aimed at people in the small towns and villages? Or was it aimed at the large city populations, mainly Bangkok?

STIER: Actually, it was aimed at them all. Bangkok and little towns, regional cities, and centers. All this was picked up and used later in Indochina also, but the main use of the materials that we were turning out, we'd send them off and have them printed in Manila, was used in what was the psywar program. The pamphlets, posters, even music would go off with teams of USIS officers, State Department and I suspect CIA people and Thai military and lay people who were instructed along very carefully-drawn programs to try to convince the head men of villages who would be brought into these regional towns, government officials, business people, Buddhist monks and general public to a lesser extent. We were trying to target the important shakers and movers there.

Stier Questioned Value And Effectiveness Of PsyWar Effort In Thailand

Q: But you weren't actually going down to the village level with these programs. You were bringing the chiefs into the towns and cities.

STIER: No, we did go to villages of a respectable size.

Anyway, frankly I never thought much of the psywar program. It was hard to convince the ordinary Thai, and I don't mean just a peasant, I mean a fairly important educated Thai, of the dangers of communism in Thailand, in those days. I can't speak about how it was after, when I'd moved on. I think perhaps some of the military worried about communism, but the Thai, as you know Lew from serving there, is a great political pragmatist. He doesn't like to worry anyway, and his religion or his philosophy—Buddhism—seems to influence that kind of an attitude. I didn't think the PIP program was very successful. I thought we were whistling at the wind. I still think so.

Q: Another thing that I wondered, the rate of literacy in Thailand is not all that high. I suppose, however, that the people with whom you were dealing in the towns were a pretty literate group. But I didn't know whether the pamphlet program would be very effective with, say, the village head men because I don't think many of them knew how to read.

STIER: That's an interesting question. I don't recall that coming up. I think mostly we aimed at government employees like teachers who would read, police, military personnel, government administrators, both regional and Bangkok-based, who traveled out there, health personnel and the like. I don't think that was a problem.

Motion Picture Programs Extensive In Thailand

One thing we did do was we made a lot of films. There was a big film program—we had film officers on the post, a couple of very talented people, and sometime we got others in on contract to produce films, with Thai soundtracks on them and we'd show these pictures widely. Always there was an American accompanying the Thai employees. So a lot of our pamphlets were very light on text and strong on pictures and captions. It was not what you'd call a sophisticated program.

As I said, I went up to Laos quite a bit. We used trips like that—I wasn't the only one doing it—rather extensively as program source material. For example, I would go up on what I

later learned were CIA financed DC-3s. I would accompany these and then write stories on what I'd see. They would fly over hamlets and villages with Thai rice in big bags, double bags, so that they could be dropped from the plane and not spill. We'd go into places where the Pathet Lao had surrounded a government hamlet or village, most of which were on little elevations, little hills, with the jungle all around them. We'd make a pass over these villages so the inhabitants could show us where they wanted the rice dropped and we'd kick the rice bags out. It was interesting that those villages, which were pretty harmless and insignificant, were being attacked. We could see and hear the attack, even see the smoke from the weapons.

Q: But there really wasn't a substantial insurgency going on in Laos at that time.

STIER: That's right, but it was burgeoning.

Q: It hadn't yet become significant.

STIER: That's right, nor had it gotten to Thailand.

Q: Did we have a post in Laos at all at that time?

STIER: Oh sure. The first time I went to Vientiane, Ted Tanen was the PAO and I slept in his house on a couch. I don't remember why I couldn't find a hotel room then. I'm dwelling too long on this, but that's how I started the Foreign Service. George Sayles finished his tour and I succeeded him. I had, I think, five Americans working with me and more than 100 Thais. We had a motion picture officer, a press officer, exhibits officer.

Q: Did you have a radio officer?

STIER: A radio officer, yes.

Q: Had a radio program?

STIER: Quite an extensive one.

Q: Now, let me ask you, in connection with the motion picture program and the radio program, did you have production facilities right on the post for motion pictures, and did you have production facilities for radio programs?

STIER: We had to the extent that we had in Radio, we had a sound room and equipment, yes. For films we had, I think we had about four or five cameramen. We had a still camera staff, Thais. But as information officer I spent most of my time from that point on either as press officer or press officer adjunct, writing speeches for the ambassador, working with the press, a more standard USIA press officer. That is, I was then not so closely associated with the psywar program.

Q: Who was your ambassador at that time? Was it Max Waldo Bishop?

Max Waldo Bishop, A Hard-line Anti-Communist, Was U.S., Ambassador To Thailand. He Exaggerated Anti-Communist Beliefs Clouded His Analysis Of Conditions In Southeast Asia

STIER: Max Waldo Bishop, yeah, yeah. He was a career foreign service officer who came to us highly touted. He had been General MacArthur's drafting officer and was very favored by MacArthur. Bishop came and was exaggeratedly anti-communist, so much so that I felt he had trouble reading the situation in Southeast Asia, with great difficulty. He wasn't alone, of course. I say this even though there was a Vietnam War which certainly gave us lots of reasons for worrying about communism in that part of the world. Mrs. Bertie McCormick, the wife of the publisher of the Chicago Tribune was not exactly a left winger, and Ambassador Bishop got into a horrendous argument with her at a luncheon in Bangkok which made the press and the New York Times and Time Magazine, in which he accused her of being soft on communism. Another time he said some pretty strong things to the most important Thai editor, Khun Kukrit Pramoj, who was the Editor of Siam

Rath and the leading media person and intellectual in the country. Khun Kukrit was terribly important because he was a nobleman, but he was also a man of great influence in Thai society and in the Buddhist world, and as you know, in Thailand that's important.

Q: He later became Prime Minister as I recall.

STIER: That's right.

Q: And I think it was Kukrit Pramoj who played the role of the Prime Minister in the Ugly American film when it was filmed.

STIER: That's right.

Q: He was briefly again Prime Minister, I think, just after I left Thailand.

STIER: Yes.

Q: But he was back on Siam Rath most of the time I was there, and he was recognized as sort of a senior intellectual in Thailand.

STIER: Yes, the Pramojs were an important family. His brother Khun Seni Pramoj, also had very responsible government positions. He was an attorney. Khun Kukrit was the former husband of a Thai employee, a lovely lady.

Q: I'm trying to think of her name now. She was still there when I left.

STIER: What was her name? Oh yes, Pakpring Janzen. Her nick- name was Puck. At any rate, we had two full tours there. I was there five years. Two of our children were born there, a boy and a girl. We all loved the country, loved the people, loved USIS Bangkok. We had a wonderful old Southeast Asian home with a great big patio which would flood in the rainy season. There were a lot of mosquitoes too. There was a big AID program to Thailand. I think we got along very well with the Thais who were very nice to us, but I really

think we were spinning our wheels with the psywar program, and the dominoes thing, too. Well, the whole panoply and farce—I don't know, how does one look on Vietnam? I have many mixed feelings. I think what's happened as a result of the communist attacks on the people of those three countries is inexcusable. On the other hand, our foreign policy decisions then were also unbelievable.

One of the interesting things that happened to me in 1959 when the fighting in Laos was heavy and the Plaine des Jars brought the world's press corps there, I was sent up—I think it was '59—on temporary duty to handle the foreign press corps, and that was fun. Laos kept taking a beating, as it has ever since—along with the other two long-suffering countries.

Q: Who was the ambassador in Laos at that time? Was it Graham Parsons?

STIER: No, let's see. It was a stout fellow. Phillips? Horace Phillips? He'd been DCM at Manila and then he became the ambassador to Vientiane. I'm not sure I have that year right. It may have been a little earlier, but that was a fabulous experience. Hank Miller was the PAO at the time.

Q: That was the time when he got his picture on the cover of Life Magazine.

STIER: That's right, dressed as a bhikku, a Buddhist monk, and shocking all Buddhists.

Q: All about six feet six or seven of him.

STIER: Yes, Old Yellow Robes.

Q: Hitting him at the knees.

STIER: Hank was a nice man. We loved Thailand, loved the Thai people. It's a beautiful country. The war in Vietnam, in Indochina, started to blow fiercer in those years, in '55-60.

We left in January or February of 1960. You could smell it coming, and already we (in USIA) were in strong arguments about our foreign policy and about our USIA policy.

USIA By Nature Of Its Work Had Knowledge And Ideas To Offer On Foreign Policy, But Was Systematically Ignored By Foreign Service Establishment

One thing which I—perhaps this is more a concluding remark, but I could return to it: I always thought that the role of the Agency participating in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy was ignored, even repudiated by the Department of State, by CIA, by DIA, the White House and the Congress, that is the entire U.S. foreign affairs community. They never would give us the opportunity to contribute meaningfully and we simply never had the clout to get our views heard. The pity is that what we had to offer was significant, that it would make a difference. So many field messages and different kinds of messages we in USIA would send back, not just from Thailand, from all over, about how our audiences felt and how our policies could be sensibly and psychologically arranged to include meaningful arguments and policy statements. A very wasteful state of affairs. At any rate, we left Thailand in early 1960 and went to Athens where I was Information Officer for five years.

Q: Before we leave Thailand, who was the PAO at the time of your departure?

STIER: Oh, I should have mentioned, Dick McCarthy.

Q: Oh, yes.

STIER: Who was as good a PAO as I ever saw, a man of great humor, a fine writer, a charming guy that I enjoyed very much working for and he taught me a lot. We became very good friends.

Q: You've mentioned when we were off tape that you thought Dick McCarthy was a great PAO and a very fine person. Since Dick has had some of his problems in the service, I'd

like you to say a few words about what your estimation of him was and how you thought he conducted the program.

STIER: Well, it was such fun working with Dick. He was open to any idea. He might nix it for a good and substantive reason, but he listened. He was friendly to ideas, creative ideas and ideas which were not congenial even to him, but he was interested in them. This made his entire staff eager to contribute to our work; it wasn't all done at the top. He never stood upon his position as PAO. He also stood up to the Embassy. Too many PAOs, as you know, are too submissive to the Embassy, shockingly so I thought, ignoring the brief that the agency had from the Congress. Our USIA director was appointed by the President and very few, not enough PAOs took that individual mandate, but Dick McCarthy did.

1960: Assignment To Athens As Information Officer

Q: What did you do? Have home leave and then go to Athens from there? You didn't have an intervening Washington assignment?

STIER: No.

Q: You went to Athens. So this would have been probably March or April.

STIER: Well, Kennedy was just elected while we were there and the Greeks thought that it was their election and it was a kind of Greek victory when Jack Kennedy was elected President of the United States.

Q: He was elected in November.

STIER: Yes.

Q: What was the Greek attitude towards the U.S. at that time?

STIER: Did you serve in Greece?

Q: I never served in Greece. I served in Turkey.

STIER: That's right, I'd forgotten.

Q: I had a lot of opportunity to observe Greece.

STIER: Well, I bow to no one in my admiration and affection for the people of Greece for their skills, abilities and virtues, but the Greeks have a little anti-almost everything built into them. They will also have positive passions built into them. They're a passionate people, often very critical of American policies. We had an enormous—it would down while we were there—but we had an enormous AID program in Greece which clearly benefited Greece, but as I say, it was winding down, and they were critical for our doing that.

Q: For winding it down?

STIER: Yes, and very forgetful of what we had done in many ways starting from Mr. Truman on. A large part of our program was to remind the Greeks of what the U.S. had done. We did a lot of work with the Greek press. We put out pamphlets and held press conferences and took them on tours both in and out of Greece. One of the things we did with the press was take them on NATO tours around Europe. I once took four or five Greek journalists out to the aircraft carrier Enterprise while it was cruising the Med.

They saw night flying operations, which are terrifying I must say.

Greek-Turkish Attitudes Re Cyprus, Plus Personality Of Archbishop Makarios Made USIS Work Difficult

The big problem when we were there, I guess they're still there, Cyprus was just—there was no way to get anywhere with the Cyprus problem. Archbishop Makarios was very difficult for the United States, a very intelligent but a very vain man and you couldn't really —American officials had a tough time dealing with him, but there was also the fact of

Turkey as there still is a question of Turkey. I mean we had to maintain good relations with both countries, and it was hard slogging. For those five years that I was there the Cyprus problem made Greek-U.S. relations extremely difficult. In Turkey, too. If the U.S. pleased Turks, the Greeks were upset, and vice versa. Working in USIS in Greece was a very delicate, vexing, but also very exciting job.

George Papandreou Comes To Power

As we left, George Papandreou had been elected to succeed Constantine Karamanlis. I liked George Papandreou, although the Greeks—a lot of Greeks at the time, and not just the right wingers, but the liberal ones—said something I think was true. He was a successful leader in opposition, but as a prime minister not so effective. That time was also the end of the royalty in Greece, King Paul and Queen Frederika, as well as their son. We were there during the time that King Constantine was married to his beautiful Danish princess. The S.S. Savannah, the world's first nuclear powered vessel, came to Greece when we were there, and we escorted the Princesses and Queen Frederika around it.

Jacqueline Kennedy Visits Athens

Jacqueline Kennedy made a trip to Greece when we were there.

Q: I've forgotten when she married Onassis. Was she already Mrs. Onassis?

STIER: No, when we were there she came as the wife of the President.

Q: Oh, before the assassination.

STIER: Yes. And a charming USIA officer by the name of John Mowinckel was the USIS officer who as a guest in her entourage helped us in USIS a great deal. I never did talk with Mrs. Kennedy myself. I maintained close contact with John and I had a wonderful working relationship with a very charming and intelligent woman by the name

of Tish Baldridge, who was Mrs. Kennedy's Press Secretary. Tish has gone on to make a wonderful career of her own in journalism and public affairs, a splendid woman.

Q: Mowinckel at that time must have been the PAO in Paris.

STIER: I think so.

Q: And he probably was assigned to her for that trip, because she speaks French and he, of course, is absolutely bilingual in French.

STIER: Yes, but perhaps more importantly because he was a personal friend of hers.

Q: And loved the French culture and so did she.

STIER: That's right. John's French was exquisite. I don't think Jackie's was in that class.

Q: No, her French was not in his class.

STIER: But they had John and they also on that—was that the same trip? No, but John also came down to help us when we had the NATO foreign ministers meeting in Greece. John came for that also, and he handled the French press there and Bill Clark came from London I guess to handle the—

Q: PAO in London.

STIER: Yes, to handle the British press. But those were great days to be in Greece.

Q: How did you feel that your personal contacts were in Athens and in Greece? Did you have a lot of influential personal contacts there that you could utilize?

STIER: I think so. For one thing I think it takes five years to become a reasonably effective USIS officer, at least on the information side. I was seasoned, I suppose. I had good contacts both with Greek working journalists, and their editors, and also with

parliamentarians, and even a couple of ministers. Yes, I think we did have good contacts there. We worked on it, always spent all of our representational allowance and much more. My wife had become what is loosely called a gourmet cook these days, but she was and is a wonderful cook. I think Audine and I did some good work for USIA in Greece. It's not easy to bowl over a Greek with American foreign policy positions. As I have said, the Turkish situation was always bad, so was Cyprus and we—oh, I could write a book about that. The Brits had their position. They were always a little laid back. You had to worry so about Turkey because of it's—Turkey was always much more responsive to NATO policy and American policy and so terribly important to us and the Greeks didn't want to accept that.

Q: Yes, the Turks have the biggest Army outside of the Soviet Union and the U.S. While their equipment wasn't always that good, they're rough tough fighters.

STIER: Look at Korea. The Turk was as good a fighter as there was in Korea.

Q: Of course, I got it all on the other end because I was in Turkey. I think I overlapped you by a year.

STIER: Yes.

Q: I went there in 1964.

STIER: Yes.

Q: To '66. Well, do you have any further comments that you want to make?

STIER: Well, we still have a few to go. Greece was just beginning, as I said, to enter the Papandreou era and as such a decidedly less favorable position for the United States in Greece. In Karamanlis, who was no walkover or patsy for the United States, we at least had a very reasonable guy who I think understood the problem of Eastern Europe much better than George Papandreou or his son Andreas ever did. Of course, Andreas was a

real left winger, or at least he played that political game. It was at that time that, let's see, Al Harkness was the PAO when I got there, and then he was followed by Vincent Joyce.

Q: Oh, yes.

PAO Vincent Joyce Allegedly Insulted Prime Minister's Son, Andreas During VOA Transmitter Negotiations—Declared Persona Non Grata

STIER: We were renegotiating a Voice of America transmitter station's agreement with the Greeks at the time and Vince was called in to discuss this with Andreas Papandreou whose father was Prime Minister. Audreas was a member of the cabinet himself and in the course of that interview about the VOA, Vince, working under instructions from Washington, and Andreas got into a warm discussion, following which Andreas claimed to have been insulted by Vince. I don't believe that Vince did that. Vince was an ardent negotiator and debater who had a bit of an Irish temper, but he would never have insulted Andreas Papandreou. And indeed, in those days we were on good personal relations —I knew Andreas and Margaret Papandreou for years, and we were good friends. We were on a first name basis, even after he became Minister. You'd call him Minister in front of other people, but privately and informally we were first namers, and so was Vince. Of course, Vince was married to a Turkish lady at the time, which didn't help, which had already made the Greek press.

Q: A lovely looking girl at that time. I haven't seen them for years.

STIER: Yes, Sevim was a beautiful woman. That situation was stacked a little bit against the Joyces. In retrospect, it was not a fortuitous assignment to send a PAO with a Turkish wife to Greece, given the Cyprus situation. At any rate, the Greek government informed us that Mr. Joyce, who had then gone off on home leave, would not be welcomed back and that if we returned him to Athens, they would declare him persona non grata.

We also had that wonderful and crusty American Ambassador, Ellis O. Briggs as our boss when I got there.

Q: He was my ambassador in Brazil

STIER: And God help you if you had to interrupt him at home with something, as sometimes the Information Officer or the PAO did. If you survived those, you felt you'd had a pretty good day. Briggs was a fascinating man to observe at work and a wonderful writer. He was followed by Henry Labouisse, whose charming and pleasant wife we got to know very well, Eve Curie Labouisse. That was the year USIA sent out that film on the Kennedys, “Years of Lightning, Day of Drums” which the Greeks liked very much. I must say, I did too. As a film, after you've seen it about ten times it began to wear a bit thin, but the first viewing was just wonderful. The royals graced its inaugural showing in Athens. I see that its maker, Bruce Herschensohn, is still very active in Los Angeles.

1965: Washington; Desk Officer For Greece, Turkey, Iran-Cyprus

Q: After Greece, where did you go?

STIER: Well, I was supposed to go to the Army War College, but the day before I was to leave Athens, all our good-byes were said, Bill Miller the European Area Director came through. I was sitting out in front of Floka's with a couple of Greek journalists, saying goodbye, when Bill walked up and joined us. I introduced Bill to them and when they left I said, I'm looking forward to the War College. He said, Vic old boy, but you're not going there. Arnold Hanson had been the Desk Officer in IAN for Greece, Turkey, Iran and Cyprus and he had just been given an assignment elsewhere, and I was sent to take his place in Washington. But before that I was given a wonderful opportunity, a tour of my area. I knew Greece and I knew Turkey, but I didn't know—well, I knew Cyprus, but I didn't know Iran, and I went to every post we had in Iran. I think there were five of them out- side of Tehran.

Q: Four or five, yes.

STIER: Iran was just a splendidly beautiful country and, of course, fascinating politically. Anyway, I spent three years in IAN as a Desk Officer. The first half, miserably, on the inside of the building, the interior wall so to speak, without a window on Pennsylvania Avenue, just going absolutely bananas. Occasion- ally I'd walk over and ask the indulgence of luckier colleagues to let me look out their window once in a while. It was a terrible claustrophobic feeling, at least for me. But finally, I worked up enough seniority in IAN to get myself a desk with a window. Big deal. I enjoyed that very much, working in Washington. It's the only tour I ever had in Washington and I never felt a Washington man. I was always a little bit of a rebel about that, but I learned a lot there, and it was fun watching the Washington government work.

Q: You said you learned a lot; what was it you thought you learned while you were in Washington?

STIER: This indeed was where I learned the Agency's principal task was assisting in the formulation of United States foreign policy, and what our role ought to be in trying to get along with the rest of the world and to effectively convince them of the rectitude of our views.

Q: Let's see. When you went back to Washington that must have been 1965?

STIER: 1965, July.

Q: Who was the director of the Agency? Was it Carl Rowen?

STIER: No, I think he'd left. It must have been Leonard Marks.

I was three years there in Washington and I'd been almost five years in Greece, so I ended up eight years of Iranian, Greek, Cyprus and Turkish affairs there. Much of that time was spent on Cyprus and NATO affairs. An increasing amount of time was spent on Iran.

Stier Drafts White Paper On Iran For Presentation To Large Foreign Policy Meeting At Department of State Warning That US Was Mistaken In Giving Total Support To Shah; That View Is Rejected

I don't know if you want this, but I really learned something there. There was a U.S. country paper in progress for Iran, and one draft was written before I got back to Washington. I contributed the USIA portion to the second draft. I'll make a long story short. I presented a kind of white paper in our contribution and Alan Carter went along and endorsed me on this. He was very strong in his support. I presented this to the whole—there were 100 people in that meeting—foreign affairs community of the United States.

Q: Was Alan at that time the Director?

STIER: Area Director.

Q: Area Director.

STIER: Yes.

Q: He had been the Deputy Director.

STIER: When Bill Miller moved along. I think Alan succeeded Bill.

Q: I think Bill went to India.

STIER: Yes, that's right, and Alan succeeded him.

In that whole vast foreign affairs group working on the Iran paper only one other officer supported the USIA position when we finally submitted our papers.

Q: Who was the head of the drafting group? Was it Rostow?

STIER: Rostow yes; not Walt, the other Rostow, Eugene, was the Chairman of the Committee of the Country Paper on Iran. But the only person who supported my view, which I'll describe briefly in a second, was Jim Spain of the State Department, who later became an Ambassador. We tried forcefully to show that the Shah, that our policy of spending all our time and putting all our resources in with the Shah, might be a limited and counter-productive policy. Of course, we were right, if I may say so, and a long time before Iran went belly-up. Now, there may have been people who agreed with us who didn't speak out, but I didn't see our view written either. It's hard to understand our vast and myopic support of the Shah and our ignoring every other view in Iran.

But working on an area desk was interesting, involving a lot of work, heavy work, a lot of drafting, a lot of going out to other places in the agency and finding out how they work, and, lest we forget, a lot of struggles with one's area director and the State Department, to mention but a few.

Q: Did you have any struggles with the media producers who often it seemed to me weren't producing for the field. They were producing what they thought was the right thing, which a lot of us who had come from the field didn't agree would be effective in the areas.

STIER: Yes, especially with the motion picture service I think. With the Voice too, there were always problems, and rather surprisingly too because most of the people there had been in the field and knew what the situation was. The root of the problem there, again, was the State Department.

One of my greatest chores as a desk officer was trudging over to State all the time, to Country Office meetings, briefings and debriefings. Sometimes State would set up a

special task force for some crisis which might be brewing at the time that would entail a desk officer spending an enormous amount of his time actually at the Department, leaving his normal work load for taking home in a briefcase.

I regularly attended weekly or daily meetings in the Department's Country Offices and that was a fecund source of information for us. People would be there as well from the Pentagon, Commerce, CIA, whatever, and sometimes we would get into some pretty heated arguments. As with the incident I recounted with the writing of the Country Paper on Iran, in these meetings it was difficult to get the Agency's point of view included in position-fixing, and again, because USIA simply doesn't have the clout of the other principal organizations in the U.S. foreign affairs community.

I don't know if the situation remains the same today, but in my time our Director was rarely at White House meetings, which boded ill for his status or clout. Perhaps an Edward Murrow would have greater influence, but I doubt most of our USIA directors had that kind of clout. I had always thought the separation of USIA from the Department of State was a sensible and effective action enabling the U.S. to take advantage of the contribution a professional and independent information agency could make to U.S. foreign policy, but across the years I came to see it had not worked out that way, and that we were, at best, a poor relation to the big movers in the foreign affairs establishment of the country.

To get back to your query about the Voice, State Department people would listen to the Voice programs in my area and then send back a telegram. I'd get it on the telephone and the Greek desk officer or country director from State would then come on to us and the Voice with criticisms of this or that the Voice had done, but I suppose that is built into the system. It's endemic in the system and you're going to have it. And I must say, I thought the Voice and the Agency withstood those attempts to dictate, to really adulterate our mission on the Voice. I respected the Voice very much for the way it held up.

Q: Once in a while I think the Voice is too concerned with trying to act like a news service and disregards the fact that they are considered the voice of America abroad.

STIER: Yes.

Q: But on the whole, I think the State Department policy has been stifling. It's been very difficult for our policy people. Of course, they have to take the brunt of it because they're the ones that pass it on down to the Voice.

STIER: Well, it's a part of the same overall problem that the people in the field have to take the heat from a prime minister or a parliamentarian or whoever, or an editor, and that gets back to the State Department and then the State Department, in trying to help their colleagues in the field, will try to put a little muscle on the Voice. One understands their dilemma, but you can't very well have a worldwide radio program and knuckle under to those people. The integrity of the news is sine qua non. At any rate, the big years for the Stiers were splendid, but followed by an equally, if not quite so splendid, difficult period in Washington where we just about starved to death. It was just terrible for us. We had five children, their university education had begun. Thank goodness for the State Department credit union and that special loan provision they had for educational loans. Audine and I went into hock and didn't get out for a number of years. The years when we could have been—not that we were very inclined, but getting into finance, investment—that opportunity was obliterated.

Q: I had much the same problem. I only had three children, having lost one in infancy, but they were all three in college at the same time and I was in Turkey and I was getting a pretty good salary by the government standards at that time.

STIER: Sure.

Q: But my goodness, even then it was about $8,000 a year to put a kid through college, and my salary was about $22,000 at the time. I know what you mean. I just never could

take the trips that I wanted to take on my own and get around. Fortunately, they all got out of school before I finished my career and I had a little more freedom later on. Well, anyway, after you finished your tour in Washington, that was what, about 1968?

1968: Country Public Affairs Officer In Ceylon (Now Sri Lanka)

STIER: In September 1968, there was a little bit of an emergency which eventuated in my becoming a PAO. I went off to Sri Lanka, Ceylon as it was, and we lived in Colombo for three fascinating years. The tour was 18 months and we asked to double that. We enjoyed it. A beautiful place, fascinating and as you now see with tragic communal problems that are just awful. I had a letter from a Jesuit priest, a native Sri Lanka, that I became friendly with there, just the other day. He's very interested in ecumenicism, and he was talking about what the toll of this most recent communal strike in Sri Lanka has taken of the Buddhist monkhood, and he really didn't—he wondered, with the greatest of compassion and zeal, how the monks were going to come out of this. Looking ahead to the rest of this century and indeed into the 21st century, he said, we must pray hard for them. You know, Buddhist priests have been attacked awfully.

Q: Oh, yes.

Political Climate In Ceylon (Especially Under Prime Minister Bandaranaike) Very Uncomfortable

STIER: We enjoyed it very much, the political life, the ongoing arguments with journalists; there's an awful lot of anti-Americanism there. Mrs. Bandaranaike rendered it a very fertile field for anybody who was pro-British, pro-Commonwealth, anti-Yankee, anti-big materialist United States. Vietnam made our position nearly untenable. It was very difficult. On the other hand, we went to the moon and brought back a rock, brought it to a Buddhist country, and the ambassador, Andrew V. Corry, that marvelous underrated American diplomat, what a splendid fellow he was, had a party at his residence which we put on for him and for hundreds and hundreds of people we showed that landing on the moon.

And some Buddhists told us they couldn't believe it—man cannot be on the moon. Some actually accused us of cheating, of faking the moon landing.

Q: Yes, I know. It was just a fake.

STIER: Yes, it was a fake.

Q: Special effects.

STIER: The famous Arthur Clark was very helpful. In fact, he brought his sophisticated electronic telescope to that party where he gave an explanatory talk. And we then looked through the telescope at the moon that we'd just seen in the film. It was a notable evening.

Q: I think I visited you on our way back from Thailand which was about the 1st of June 1970.

STIER: 1970.

Q: The election was just about to take place. On our way back from a fascinating tour around the island, which you arranged for us, we happened to encounter the then prime minister (about to be ousted in the election that occurred a few days after our departure). We stopped for lunch at a restaurant some distance from Colombo, and suddenly realized that the campaigning Prime Minister, with colleagues, was also dining there.

STIER: Dudley Senanayake.

Q: Yes. Anyway, Mrs. Bandaranaike beat him in that election.

STIER: Yes.

Q: That was just about a week or two after we had left Thailand, quite a landslide and she took over.

STIER: Yes, and not, in my opinion, very good for the country.

Q: No.

STIER: Dudley Senanayake was a much better manager and, of course, much more understanding of Sri Lankan and American policy needs. Mrs. Bandaranaike was always hostile.

Q: She was hostile. Was her husband a prime minister before she was?

STIER: Yes, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike.

Q: And they were always off in the socialist camp.

STIER: Do you have time for a little Bandaranaike joke?

Q: By all means.

STIER: Mr. Bandaranaike, who was dead by the time we got there, was a Cambridge man and a bit of a snob. While he was Prime Minister a new envoy from India was named who came to present his credentials to the Prime Minister. They loathed each other on sight. The Prime Minister made a point of urging the Indian ambassador to learn Sinhalese during his tour there. And the ambassador said I hope to do that. So they fought for, I think, for all the three years that the Indian was there. When he made his farewell call on Mr. Bandaranaike, the Prime Minister recalled to the Indian that he had recommended his learning Sinhalese and wondered if he had had any success. Well, the Indian said, it's been rather difficult, but I have made some progress. I have learned how to say Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike, and he said it all out very carefully. In other words, showing just how Sinhalese the Bandaranaikes actually were.

But it was fun there despite the weather. There was a little lake, Balgoda, about 20 miles outside Colombo, and we used to go on Sunday and sail a 14-foot sailboat. We'd take a

picnic lunch with us and mix with the local foreign people and Sri Lankans who belonged to the little sailing club there. It was nice. We learned to eat hot curry.

Q: Was there a pretty general antipathy towards the Americans and the American position during the time that you were there?

STIER: To the extent of Vietnam it was pretty hostile, yes. We didn't have much of an AID program and it was not easy for the U.S. to be heard in Ceylon. We were a lot below that. They were a commonwealth country and more interested in Europe and they received more help from Europe. Many of the educated people had gone abroad for an education, not all, but a lot of them. It was considered most advantageous to have been to Cambridge or Oxford. By the time we were there, however, many Sri Lankans had been educated in the United States.

We had a very strong cultural program that was very effective, I must say. We had wonderful national staff employees there, as—let me say—we had everywhere, how wonderful they were. The unappreciated “local” employee rarely got a fair break for himself, you know, in either pension rights or salary. It varied from country to country. But they had to pick up the pieces when they fell between the sticks.

Q: Yes, there was always the Washington assignment, but somehow the local employees weren't credited as being as smart or as well educated as the Americans, and therefore they automatically had a secondary position.

STIER: Yes.

Q: But in most posts that I saw, they were the ones that kept the ball rolling and the clock ticking and, importantly, providing continuity.

STIER: Absolutely. But Sri Lanka was a great tour. I think we had some—we had fairly successful programs; there was general admiration for American education and our

economy, but the insidious presence of the Indo-Chinese War just made it tough. The argument on the war went on incessantly.

Q: And with the predisposition, I gather from what you said, to look at the British as the ideal rather than the Americans.

STIER: Yes.

Q: On top of that the Vietnamese War was just too much.

STIER: Unfortunately. But we left Sri Lanka in 1971 and went to Helsinki, where the Vietnam War was even more of a thorn in our side than it had been in South Asia.

Q: Do you have any further thoughts that you want to give on the Ceylonese or the Sri Lankan scene?

The Lawless Insurrection Of Dissidents In 1970-71

STIER: They were in increasing political trouble when we were there and it was a harbinger of what has happened since. The first major communal riots and troubles in Ceylon were in 1958 I recall, and the first ones after that were in 1971, well, the end of 1970, early 1971, just before we left. It was dangerous around there. The so-called youth groups, the JVP, of the guerilla insurrection were storming police barracks and assassinating people, although nothing like what has followed. Our Embassy was attacked, a police guard killed, cars were burned and our flag stolen.

Q: Was this mainly the Tamil agitation?

STIER: No, this was not Tamil. It was a—they called themselves Youth Guerrillas. They were left wingers of a rare and, I might say, eccentric kind; hostile to the Buddhist leadership, hostile to the Ceylonese leadership, and not focusing on the Tamils nor the communal problems in the country. They were dangerous and violent. It was a nasty time.

But it was mostly a political move by dissident Ceylonese groups who were being aided by the North Koreans of all things. But that insurrection was evidence of the underlying economic and social problems endemic in Sri Lanka.

Q: So that really the Tamils didn't become a problem until the Ceylonese made them so. Is that your reading of the situation?

The Later Tamil Insurrection That Plagues Sri Lanka Today Is More The Fault Of the Tamils Aided By Indian Support

STIER: Well, the Tamils brought this on themselves. The relations were always bad, but since 1958 they'd been fairly calm. Yet every time we went up to Jaffna in the North, we would hear the Tamil discontents. It was only 18 miles across the strait to India and India didn't make it any easier for a Ceylonese government of Ceylon to try to handle the Tamil problem and that has been revealed in the last few years, of course. But our relationships were good. We renegotiated a Voice of America transmitting station contract there when we were there very advantageously, even with Mrs. Bandaranaike as Prime Minister.

Q: Apparently, for all their differences politically and nationalistically, Henry Loomis and Mrs. Bandaranaike hit it off pretty well.

STIER: Yes. I think they did.

Q: And that seems to be the thing that finally made it possible for the new transmitter to be constructed.

STIER: Yes. Mrs. Bandaranaike had a kind of a caricature of a left wing reputation, I always thought. She's a different type of personality from Mrs. Aquino, but she had the same background. She was from a very wealthy aristocratic family which owned huge plantations. She was always the first one to talk—demand indeed, to demand land reform,

but there she was with her millions of acres. It's ludicrous in some ways, but the people accepted it. Or seemed to do.

Ever since Ceylon won her independence from Great Britain in 1948 they have received substantive foreign assistance and more social programs the country really couldn't afford. There was a French diplomat there when I was who used to love to needle the Ceylonese newsmen who would give the west a hard time and argue that Ceylon was not getting enough money from the west. The Frenchman would say, no, you're wrong, you're a very, very rich country. You have free food rations. You have a free national health system. You ride for almost free on a heavily subsidized state transportation system. Your schools are free. Everything is free, and you call us—you want money from us? Don't be silly. In fact, you are very well off. Anyway, we went off to Finland and into the NATO world again.

1971: Transferred To Finland

Q: That was in 1971.

STIER: Yes. Not that Finland was in NATO but the Nordic countries with the exception of Finland were, and it was a kind of Cold War climate.

Q: Well, Sweden also was not in NATO.

STIER: Not Sweden, but Iceland, Denmark and Norway, and there was the special agreement between the Soviet Union and Finland, the great treaty.

Finns Have An Ambivalent, Somewhat Uneasy Accommodation With Soviets, Which They Dislike But Still Defend

We lived with the reality of Finlandization which the Finns were quick to defend, and rightly so, because in fact it worked quite well for them. They didn't really like it, but it was a much more preferable situation than that of the Baltic States.

Q: Well, we had the tape off for a moment while we discussed the situation in Korea. What did you find in Finland? What was their attitude towards the United States? You said colored by the Vietnamese War.

STIER: Colored by the Vietnamese War, yes, but with a thriving Finnish-American Society with frequent flights of Finns visiting the United States, a considerable colony of Finnish immigrants in the United States and a good warm personal feeling from Finns to Americans and vice versa.

Q: Despite their disagreement with our—

STIER: Very much so. The Soviet problem was ubiquitous there. It was the only place where I have ever personally been assiduously targeted by the Soviet Union. The PAO apartment when we got there was a beautiful place, and was just across the street from the huge Soviet embassy.

I'll give you an example of how the Finns felt about that. We were giving a dinner party once and a Finnish doctor who was also politically active was invited for our party. He arrived early and he and I were having a cup of tea in a room through which, if you looked out through the curtain, you could see the Soviet embassy, looking right at us. My guest began to talk about Finnish foreign policy and their relations with the Soviet Union, when he suddenly realized where he was. He gave a great start and said, excuse me. He walked to the window and drew the drapes. He was worried about Soviet embassy surveillance, both audio and visual, and that concern was surprisingly widespread among the Finns. That fear and I hate to use the word hatred, but it was very strong.

Q: They felt very adversely about the Russians?

STIER: They sure did. Well, they have had a long hard experience of “enjoying” a common border with the USSR. It was frequent to hear Finnish women who were young during the

Winter War with the Soviets (1939) lament their husbandless state because of the terrible carnage among Finnish men during the disastrous 1939 war.

Q: They certainly might well be.

STIER: They have, the Finns, a lingering resentment that the west, the United States, England and France mainly, didn't get up to help them. They're bitter. They're anti-Soviet. They regard the Yalta accords as a sellout. They're also anti-Swedish.

Q: Anti what?

STIER: Swedish.

Finns Very Argumentative And Critical Of U.S. In Vietnam War. Swedes, Many Of Whom Are In Finland, Even More So

I argued, I fought the Vietnam War from the day we landed in Helsinki until the day we left. But somehow we argued harder with the Swedes. One of the ploys I used to use when I was arguing with a politician, journalist or academic was to say, look at the Swedes. You're always telling us how the Swedes were friendly with Hitler in World War II. I then would say, look, you're always complaining how the Swedes are, and the Swedes are, if anything, more anti-U.S. on Vietnam than you Finns are, but how can you reconcile those two positions? They never—they'd laugh.

But that was a real problem Lew, while I was in Finland. There is a large Swedo-Finn minority in Finland, many Finns speak and read Swedish, as of course do all the Swedo-Finns read and understand Finnish as well as Swedish, and the exposure to Swedish media is extensive in Finland. The Swedes, as you know, were much more virulent about Vietnam than the Finns, much, much more anti-American.

The U.S. Ambassador to Sweden, Jerome Holland, told me once in Helsinki that Swedish groups used to demonstrate in front of his residence. One day, his wife and teenage son

returned to the residence, to be chased from their car to their front door, and the crowd threw human excrement after them, shouting anti-U.S. slogans at the harassed pair.

Q: For goodness sakes.

STIER: Ambassador Holland told me that personally.

Q: This happened in Sweden.

STIER: In Stockholm. So we wouldn't have that kind of incident in Finland. The Swedes were much harder to deal with, but Vietnam was a tough problem. NATO: Finland was probably happy that NATO existed but in no position to say so and that was our line too. We didn't talk NATO very much, although we did invite Finns to look at installations of NATO.

Q: Exactly.

STIER: Not with any fanfare, but you bet. We had a strong cultural program and a wonderful Fulbright program. I was on the Fulbright board the whole time I was in Finland and it was very rewarding to work with those good universities there. The Finns are a little hard to get to know, mainly because they're shy I guess, but they're splendid people, beautiful people, they run a very tight ship economically. They are hard workers, hard players.

Q: You know, I have found that I don't know very many Finns, but this gentleman about whom I spoke was in the World Bank for four years. I found him rather interesting, because both when he was in the Bank and after he went back to Finland and made occasional trips to the United States, we would see him and talk to him. I found him sort of an apologist for the Russian position. He was not a left winger by any means. On the other hand, he didn't seem to have the antipathy towards the Soviets that you say is quite prominent among the Swedes.

STIER: The Finns are different.

Q: And he would say, well, you know, we do get advantages from this arrangement, and the Soviets aren't all that difficult to deal with. I learned also—

STIER: Well, I think that's true, not that they're friendly to them. There are mutual advantages to the Finnish-Soviet relationship.

Q: They have certain contracts with the Soviet Union. The Finnish technicians and engineers go there to construct or renovate various buildings, plants, or factories.

STIER: Construct factories for them, railways, big projects. The Finns are very strong in heavy manufacture, in infrastructure kind of industry and they appreciate the fact that their contracts with the Soviet Union are good for them, and their position economically is very good. A lot of their power comes from the Soviet Union, but your friend sounds a little more friendly than the ordinary Finn.

Q: He seemed to me...

STIER: Soviet.

Q: I assumed that they were fairly resentful of the Soviets having taken over Karelia and put them in the position that they did by that war.

STIER: Yes.

Q: But he seemed to gently admonish me for being that critical of the Soviet Union. I was rather interested in his attitude.

STIER: Well, its an ambivalent situation. They feel sorry for the Russian people, but they don't like them all that much either. They'll never forget the 1939 war.

Stier Was Targeted In Finland By Member Of Soviet Embassy Staff

We were there until 1975, '71-'75, the Brezhnev years. I started to say that I was targeted there. There was a—I guess he was supposed to be a kind of press officer for the Soviet embassy, but I believed him to be a KGB type. He was always after me to go out to dinner or lunch with him. Alternatively, I would insist that he would come to our home for lunch or I would take him out. I didn't want to be the only recipient of lunches. The main Soviet line is one you're hearing now in the United States about Gorbachev, I'm interested to note. Victor Koslov, that was his name, would say that we had to support Brezhnev very strongly in arms agreements, in trade agreements, in economic agreements, in cultural agreements. We “had” to accept the Brezhnev policies and the Brezhnev era policies because if you don't you'll drive out Brezhnev and then we'll get the real hard-liners. Today I hear Americans saying the same thing about Gorbachev. I'm a little skeptical, myself.

Q: You say this fellow was a Soviet information type.

STIER: Type, yes. He'd been at the UN for a long time, had splendid English, loved American clothes and cognac. A great cognac man. But a most engaging fellow.

Q: Most of the so-called information people in the Soviet embassy are KGB.

STIER: Oh, I think he was.

Q: The one that we had in Thailand was KGB.

STIER: I'm sure.

Q: Very personable guy.

STIER: Oh yes.

Q: I've forgotten his last name, but his first name was Yuri. We were on a first name basis. He was always trying to probe our younger officers, and he was after them, trying to get them to make statements that could be twisted around for the benefit of the Soviet position. We had a couple of very naive young officers, one of whom made a considerably improper statement.

STIER: Embarrassing.

Q: To Yuri and it came back later through different channels unfortunately to the Ambassador. So I'm sure that you were targeted.

STIER: This man that was on me, his name was Victor also. We used to kid about that. He'd been in the UN, but he was working me. Our personal relations with the press were good in Finland, but rather difficult. It was a tough place to work because of Vietnam I remember, and also because you couldn't take the more ordinary view, at least so easily in print, with the Soviet Union because the Finnish treaty with the Soviets prevented Finns from being critical of them, publicly, at least.

Q: And they were in a difficult position too.

STIER: Of course. One had to respect that.

Q: Could you use any anti-communist material at all?

STIER: Well, you didn't want to rock their boat very hard. Those were good years. We enjoyed them very much, even the weather.

1975: Transfer To The Hague, Netherlands

But we marched on, and in 1975 we were off to The Hague for our Last Hurrah.

Q: Without having another Washington tour.

STIER: No, I successfully—once was enough. We were in Holland from 1975 through the end of 1979 when I became 60 and was mandatorily retired, not felicitously so. I wanted to work a couple more years, but again, we were lucky in our assignments. We enjoyed all the places we lived. We liked the people. We were even happy about the extremes of weather. We've had a lot of hot weather, and we didn't mind the cold.

Q: How did you find the Dutch about the Americans?

STIER: Oh boy. The Dutch are pretty pro-American, friendly, go there all the time, culturally very susceptible to American ways and fads and modes, very well informed. A lot of them have been to school there. A lot of the media people had worked there for their newspapers, magazines, radio, television. That was good. They knew the United States very well indeed. The Dutch go back to our fight for independence. They've loaned us money. It's very strong. On Thanksgiving we all would troop traditionally down to the Old Pilgrim Church in Rotterdam for the annual commemoration of the Pilgrims' stay in Holland and the ambassador would give a speech. So many Dutch immigrants are in the United States, and that increased the bonds between us. That, and the Dutch mastery of English made for very close relationships. On the other hand, it also made it easier for them to lambaste us in their marvelous, candid, outspoken Dutch way. The Dutchman is an outspoken, honest critic.

Q: Okay, at the end of the last tape you were commenting on the ubiquitous use of English among the Dutch. I gather from what you say that there's a pretty good feeling about America and Americans among the Dutch, although I've had friends who have said they've had some unpleasant experiences with them. But am I correct in saying that generally the Dutch are quite friendly?

STIER: Yes, I'd say so. I think what you've referred to as American friends having bad experiences in Holland come from the far out elements in Dutch society which are replicas of similar groups in our own country, the drug culture, the very radical, chic radical groups.

But in art, for example, the Municipal Museum in Amsterdam is full of modern American abstract art. American films are popular. Television fare is sickeningly American.

Q: You mean, American programs?

STIER: Yes. The Dutch have a good feeling about us. They are grateful to the United States for our World War II participation. One of the most moving things in the annual American-Dutch calendar is, I guess it's on Memorial Day, when the Netherlands American Society sponsors a moving ceremony in the beautiful U.S. cemetery at Margraten.

The Dutch character is frank and bluntly forthright so that you have to—you can't have a thin skin around Dutch Parliamentarians and leaders, academics and the press. They'll tell you what they think. On the other hand, they permit you to tell them your view and you can make a rebuttal. I found them a very decent people to work with.

Q: Well, in view of the fact that they are so disposed towards America, other than the cultural program, what were your objectives then in Holland? It seems that you really didn't have a great problem of trying to sell the United States there.

STIER: No, I don't think so. We had a program typically concentrating on negotiations with the Soviet Union based on our NATO relationships, in which of course the Dutch played a leading role.

The Dutch felt strongly that U.S. consultation with the Dutch was inadequate and our constant apprehension was that we and our Dutch audiences would be caught by surprise by some U.S. Government action taken in concert, say, with the British, the French and West Germans. When that occurred it was a bad day.

Q: It happened two or three times that I know of.

STIER: More than that. But the Dutch were interested in NATO, but didn't really like even the small NATO presence we had there. We had a fighter squadron. But our main (USIS)

interest was foreign economic policy, the Dutch being some of the world's greatest traders with an enormous trade relationship with the United States. I learned more economics during my four years there than I did the whole rest of my life, I think.

Q: Did you ever run across Pat Van Delden out there?

STIER: It's a funny thing. Pat, of course, was a predecessor PAO of mine.

Q: That's right.

STIER: And she had taken herself from the public view. She'd literally disappeared.

Q: I've never been able to find track of her in the last 20 years and I knew her very well.

STIER: It was a common understanding, I think my predecessor told me that when she'd get mail he wasn't even to try to pass it on. He had—the PAOs always had an address for Pat, a mailing address, in Holland down country someplace. And only once in the four years I was there did we get a piece of mail for her that looked as if it ought not to be thrown away. It was heavy, with a lot of stamps on it, insured, the lot, and I went to someone, I won't use names on this because I was sworn to secrecy. I had met a Dutch friend of hers and her husband. Pat married a Dutchman, and she herself was of Dutch descent, I think.

Q: I'm not sure, but she married an Indonesian Dutchman. The family had been big in Indonesia.

STIER: Anyway, this Dutchman knew where Pat lived, although he didn't see her anymore. He himself didn't understand why. But at any rate, I took in this letter and showed it to him and said I think she should have a chance to destroy this herself. He agreed with me, but in a week or so I was told to destroy the letter. Now, you can figure that one out. So, I never met her.

Q: I have wondered because about 1971 or 1972, she just seemed to cut off communication with everyone. Anyone I've ever encountered who knew her and knew her well, says, "whatever happened to Pat Van Delden?"

STIER: The only speculation I heard quite frequently was that she had been connected or seen to be connected with the CIA and either got frightened, furious or in an embarrassing position and took herself out of common society. I don't know. Very interesting.

Q: It is.

STIER: We loved the Netherlands. Its geographic position in Europe was so strategic for travel, too. You had the whole economic life of the world right there, and in Brussels you had NATO and the European Community. But like all things in life, the end comes. In September 1979 we piled our belongings in the car, took our poodle and toured Europe for a couple of months before we came home here to Berkeley.

Q: Well, do you have any final comments you would like to add about your USIA career, observations as to what you did right or wrong, whatever?

STIER: I don't know. Professionally it was always interesting, and was surprisingly hard work. It wasn't an eight to five sinecure. I have some rather strong personal views about what the U.S. role in the world should be, and often I was out of internal sync with American foreign policy. I kept that to myself, of course, but I mostly had the feeling our superpower mien and role was not the best policy for us. This is too long already, so I'll skip it, but I think we were a little muscular most of the time. The Agency itself was fun to be a part of, the people were terrific and I kept learning and learning. As with Evelyn Waugh, "I rejoice that I went when the going was good."

And personally, we met so many wonderful people, all over the world. Creation is an incredibly beautiful and complex thing, and I am glad my family and I had a shot at seeing so much of it, in all its glory.

End of interview